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NEW TITLES
FROM MARVEL IN 1983
NUMBER 21

COMICS FEATURE

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A PREVIEW OF
THE JLA INDEX

DON HECK
INTERVIEWED



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FEATURE

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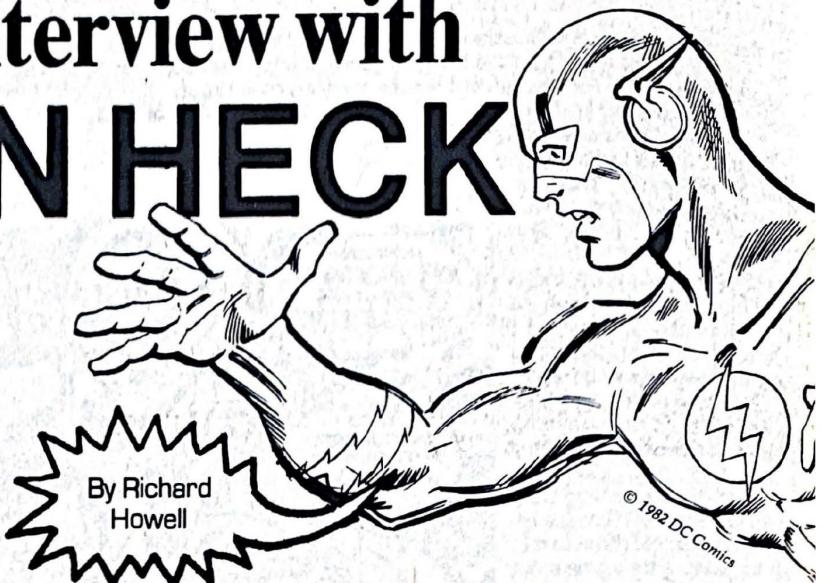
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publisherMIKE HARRIS
New York
correspondentJACK
SCHUSTER
presidentROBERT LEWIS
production
managerMARY
HECKMAN
production
assistantLESLIE CIOFFI
typesettingSTEVE SCHULZ
traffic dept.**CONTRIBUTORS**Matt Feazell
Mike Harris
Richard Howell
Jim Korkis
Robert Lewis
Rian Nelson
Rick Norwood
Gene Phillips
Peter Sanderson
Bob Soron
Don & Maggie
Thompson
Bryan Uhlenbrock
Murray R. Ward

An interview with DON HECK



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By Richard Howell

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HOWELL: We'll start with a real easy one. How did you get into comics?

HECK: I started work at Harvey Publications-inside, doing paste-up, and white-out, and finishing off reprint work and stuff.

HOWELL: That was in the early 1950s?

HECK: That was 1949. About December 1949, I think is when I first started. I always wanted to be a cartoonist, only because one of my favorites was Milt Caniff. Obviously. (Laughter)

HOWELL: Yeah, I picked that up.

HECK: Anybody could tell.

HOWELL: What was Harvey publishing at the time? What sort of comics?

HECK: Well, they used to put out TERRY AND THE PIRATES-they used to put out a lot of reprints. DICK TRACY, TERRY AND THE PIRATES, that one that Alfred Andriola did, KERRY DRAKE...

HOWELL: Right.

HECK: They were also the ones that put out BOY'S RANCH by Jack Kirby (and Joe Simon).

HOWELL: I know it well.

HECK: Yeah, that was a beaut. I wish I would'a grabbed a bunch. I was right there in the office (laughter).

HOWELL: Oh, boy.

HECK: But that's life, y'know. If you could only go back...

HOWELL: I guess. So they were involved in quite a lot of different types of comics?

HECK: Yeah, quite a bit. They had romance, they had BLACK CAT, done by Lee Elias. They also had, oh, JOE PALOOKA, LITTLE MAX...Now you're really joggin' em.

HOWELL: Did you start drawing for Harvey, too?

HECK: No, I didn't. In fact, one of the guys who was there was in circulation or something like that, and he was leaving. About that time another

friend of mine was leaving, too, and I thought well, I was going to get all the garbage stuff to do, so I decided I'd better go out and try to free-lance. I made some samples up, but they (Harvey) weren't interested in my work—which was normal, I was only a beginner. Then I decided I'd call up three different outfits in one day. I decided to go out and try to see if I could sell anything.

HOWELL: There were more publishers in those days, I take it?

HECK: There were about 20-25 in those days. I mean, you could just pick up your phone and take a shot. And so, the first day I walked out I got two jobs. I didn't even go to the third guy.

HOWELL: Why bother?

HECK: Anyway, talk about luck. One job was for Quality and the other, I think was for Hillman.

HOWELL: Do you remember what they were?

HECK: The names of the stories, or something?

HOWELL: Well, characters, or what types...

HECK: Well, no, it wasn't that. It was just, like, mystery stuff or weird stuff. No major comic or anything.

HOWELL: So you actually started drawing by doing the mystery stories?

HECK: Yeah. More or less, yeah—like the weird type stuff. Then, I guess I did a couple of those, and then this fellow I told you about who worked in circulation at Harvey called me up because he was going to start a publishing outfit. And so, I got by for the first two years free-lancing. I had somebody who wanted me to start working for him. I got very lucky. Then what did I do? I have an old book here, so I can look up what the hell I did (laughter). I did work for WAR FURY and WEIRD TERROR, and what else? HORRIFIC and stuff like that. DANGER COMICS. It was about these different men who did all sort of things, like working in steel mills and all sorts of things like that.

HOWELL: Oh, really?

HECK: And then we finally wound up with a main



page or something like that. You can try to take one panel or something, and pop it up. Sometimes it works, and other times it doesn't, but if the script has something to it where you can get into it—a little meat to it—then it works better. And that would be normal, I would imagine.

HOWELL: Len Starr told me a story about how when he was working in the comic book shop back in the early 1950s, he said he was considered one of the better storytellers in the shop, so he kept being given the stories that were dull.

HECK: Yeah, well, that would be normal, too, I guess. I'm not sure if it's always true that way or not—I used to get some stuff when Marvel was doing things (I think it was later in the 1960s) if the book wasn't selling as well, I never knew if mine were considered that good at the time—but that may be because of monetary reasons. In other words, they didn't want to tell you that your books were selling, because you'd be liable to ask for more money.

HOWELL: I remember you got THE X-MEN sometime late in the 1960s, and that was traditionally not a very good seller.

HECK: Yeah, well, I was doing breakdowns on it, I think, at one time...

HOWELL: Right, right.

HECK: ...AND I think it was Werner Roth that was pencilling, and Colletta was inking it.

HOWELL: I remember that.

HECK: I think I did one with Ross Andru, too, if I'm not mistaken. He pencilled it and I inked it. I'm trying to dig the memory a little bit (laughter).

HOWELL: It must have been tough to be working in that sort of atmosphere, in which they wouldn't really tell you whether your work was selling or not.

HECK: Not really. It didn't bother me much one way or another, because all I was interested in is getting jobs I could turn out really well. Y'know, you just figure—after having gone through 1957 where everything took a nosedive—you were hap-

py that you were working regular. That's about what it amounted to. I mean, I wasn't sure that the next time I walked in somebody wasn't going to say, "By the way, we just closed up shop."

HOWELL: Oh, great.

HECK: Especially being that you were now dealing with three or four outfits, rather than twenty.

HOWELL: Yeah, so now if one of them goes...

HECK: It can get you a little more nervous. Like today, you've got DC and you've got Marvel. You may have a few others on the stands, but they're not that big anymore, y'know?

HOWELL: So if one of them closes down, there's going to be a big scramble?

HECK: Yeah. Well, either that or...well, you're dealing with the conglomerates, too, so that makes a big difference, y'know. I mean, they can dicker among themselves and say, "It's not making money. Drop it."

HOWELL: Fortunately, they both claim to be healthy.

HECK: Well, I hope so. I am very happy to hear that.

HOWELL: Do you pencil differently for yourself, for when you know you're going to be inking a particular job?

HECK: Yeah. Lighter. Because when I get it back, I can look at it, and if I see something I don't like, I can just change it. Y'know, in other words, I won't have put that much in at certain points. Certain things I will tighten up, and other things I will leave looser—especially backgrounds. If I'm drawing trees, for instance, I'll just sketch in the shapes. Most of the detail is added in the inking.

HOWELL: Do you ink mostly with a brush?

HECK: No, I ink mostly with a pen in fact.

HOWELL: Really?

HECK: Yeah. I use a brush for the juicy blacks that are put on, like the wrinkles and stuff like that. That's all brush.

HOWELL: Looks like a pretty loose pen line on the rest, though.

HECK: Yeah, well, I use different types of pen-